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(see story pages 11 - 16)



In so many ways, ours is a remarkable country. Will the majority of gardeners ever be reconciled to the 'droughts and flooding rains', the fragility of our soils, the uniqueness of the vegetation and the different cultural practices it demands; its elegant interdependence with animal life...the list goes on.

In times past, gardens were often judged by the greenness of lawns, neat edges, weed-free cultivated beds and the mandatory 'splash of colour'. Rare or difficult to grow plants, successfully cultivated, received accolades, even for pathetic specimens of species compared with those found in their natural state. But things are changing - albeit slowly.

*Your Garden* recently held a garden competition and first prize was awarded to William Martin of Noorat, Victoria, whose garden Wigandia was described as 'pointing the way for gardeners into the new millennium'. It was also described as being 'the result of an in-depth knowledge of plants and soils, an ability to accept rather than try to convert the landscape and climate; a desire to maximise creativity and minimise labour, and a will to conserve our natural resources.' This same garden was last described by Clive Blazey of The Diggers' Club as 'one of the most imaginative and artistic gardens I have seen anywhere in the world' and a garden which 'challenges many orthodox gardening ideas'.

In the 1970s when the Native Plant Movement was receiving enthusiastic support, landscape architects were talking about the possible emergence of a truly Australian style of gardening. The concept was subsequently dismissed as probably an impossibility because of our climatic and ethnic diversities. Maybe Wigandia is closer to the mark?

At the Annual Conference we are hosting in Bowral in November, it will be interesting to see and hear about the district's heritage and what is now happening in this bastion of enthusiastic gardeners. The Southern Highlands of New South Wales have long been held in high regard by keen gardeners. They continue to flock to the region to garden. Where else (can anyone tell me?) has a garden society placed a limit on membership and established a waiting list!

The conference forum provides for eight of the district's passionate gardeners to each give a short presentation on the particular approach taken to their respective 'patches'. But while those patches differ from each other, there is no doubt that much of the Southern Highlands is hardly typical of Australia. It has been often described as a 'little bit of England' with its seductive rolling green hills, mountain mists, dry stone walling and many historic properties modelled on English country houses.

Recent years have brought a downturn in agricultural productivity because of changing economies, subdivision of large estates etc., but a resurgence in horticultural pursuits, dam building, bore sinking, fencing and planting on an unprecedented scale. Thirteen years ago, respected academic Professor George Seddon, when visiting the Southern Highlands to give some guidelines to the part development should be taking, expressed the recognition that the district was offering a similar environment to the English and European origins of many of our first settlers. However he also expressed some concern for the changing cultural landscapes he observed.

Many changes have happened since then and what we see today is very different to that of just a decade or two ago. Previously, clumps of eucalypts and other native vegetation were the 'solid pockets' of masses between green pastured 'spaces'. Nowadays the ubiquitous Leyland cypress screen the green spaces from view and it is the eucalypt pockets which we see into and interpret as the 'spaces'.

Our Conference theme, 'Richness in Diversity', will be illuminated by well-respected keynote speaker, Dr Judyth McLeod, an academic who devotes a good deal of time to the issues of biodiversity and in particular the need to protect old varieties of plants and is well known as an enthusiast of heritage gardening.

Will today's gardens be tomorrow's heritage? The Australian Garden History Society has come of age with the forthcoming 21st National Conference. Have our gardens also come of age?

John Stowar started his work career as a high school science teacher, and not knowing whether to pursue an interest in farming or design, it came as a welcome surprise to him to discover the field of landscape design. On immediately retraining, the path was set for his professional life. It has included many years as a landscape architect in private practice as well as government employ and an ongoing vocation as a teacher of design and horticulture.

For the last decade, John has combined this with media work in print journalism and television presentation. He has four books published and, being a passionate gardener, has for the past eighteen years been developing a 'modified rainforest' garden on the Illawarra escarpment near Robertson. Currently his interests focus on the therapeutic role of nature and gardens.



## GUEST EDITORIAL

by John Stowar

# CONTENTS

## THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS



4

### *Landscape as History*

KEN TAYLOR looks at the cultural landscape of the Southern Highlands

7

### *A Glimpse of Betsey Throsby's World*

DAVID BURKE meanders through the townships of the Southern Highlands

11

### *Australian Flora: Two Hundred Years of Environmental and Cultural Change*

ROBYN MAYO explores in illustrations and words the tenuous link between our indigenous flora and the hand of man

17

### *Louisa Atkinson and her Oldbury Landscape*

ELIZABETH LAWSON brings to life this talented botanist, writer and artist

20

### *The Bookshelf*

TREVOR NOTTLE delves into garden history with Jane Brown's retrospective

21

### *Australian Elm Register*

JO GRIGG puts out a timely warning to owners of elms to be vigilant in reducing spread of European Elm Leaf Beetle

22

### *Botanical snippets...*

23

### *Calendar of Events*

24

### *The Back Page*

ELIZABETH LAWSON presents Louisa Atkinson's watercolour/pencil sketch of Oldbury Farm.

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# LANDSCAPE as

History

by Ken Taylor

THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS is a significant historic cultural landscape and document of social history offering a remarkable window into our past.

It epitomises admirably what the renowned English historian, William Hoskins, meant when he introduced his seminal work *The Making of the English Landscape* with the comment that 'the ... landscape itself to those who know how to read it aright is the richest historical record we possess'. Driving through the area *en route* between Canberra and Sydney one is acutely aware that everywhere history makes its presence felt, waiting to be interpreted.

The area played a significant role in early European exploration and then rural settlement of the colony of New South Wales. The history

of European exploration and subsequent settlement and land-use developments from the 1820s onwards has left a distinctive landscape pattern with a series of layers representing various periods through history telling the story of human occupation of the land and attitudes to it. The region is widely regarded for its historic and aesthetic values as an important cultural landscape with identifiable heritage significance.

At the centre of the Southern Highlands is a rural landscape supporting extensive grazing with some crop growing in the eastern portion. It occupies an undulating hill and valley topography with an altitude range of about 650 - 850 metres above sea level and is bisected by the Wingecarribee River. The undulating topography is punctuated by a number of landmark hills and historically significant towns and villages. The area is also famous for its historic gardens. This central rural area setting

Kirkham Avenue, Bowral  
Photo by D. Speers  
Source: Parry Collection,  
Mitchell Library



is surrounded by eucalypt clad forested hills underlain by sandstone, in particular the Hawkesbury group. The encircling forested landscape consists of extensive national park land, state forest, and Sydney metropolitan water catchment land.

At the time of European occupation the western part of the area was a rich source of game, food and shelter for Aboriginal people. The landscape consisted of open woodland and meadows. It resembled an English park of the landed gentry and was prized in economic terms by the explorers and settlers for its grazing potential. The reactions to the landscape were affectively informed by English eighteenth century notions of landscape aesthetics where perceptions of landscape productivity and Arcadian landscape beauty intermingled. Physically this landscape was a result of two factors. One was, and remains, the underlying geology of mixed sedimentary rocks and basalt, with the latter giving rich soils, the other being the effects of fire from presumed periodic burning by Aboriginal occupants for game and hunting. Some indication of the landscape confronting the Europeans, and their imaginative occupation of it for its grazing potential, can be seen from the following early descriptions quoted by Jervis :

*The country still runs fine, full of large meadows and some thousands of acres of land without any timber on it, except here and there one tree, and some large lakes of water...*

*We got to the top of this bill, where we had a most delightful prospect of the country, and in my opinion one of the finest in the world. It must certainly be a pleasure to any man to view so fine a country.*

The development of the cultural landscape post-1800 is revealed through a series of recognisable settlement patterns and themes. It is the surviving evidence from these periods of landscape making visible as a series of layers in the present landscape which create today's landscape and its sense of history. Early exploration and settlement 1800-1840s saw the region important as a route for explorers in the early 1800s. From 1816 extensive land grants for pastoral purposes were given and people moved in with cattle and sheep. Convict labour constructed the South Road which drove south through the colony of New South Wales from Sydney to the Limestone Plains where Canberra now stands. This period saw the establishment of large pastoral holdings like Charles Throsby's 1000 acre grant made by Governor Lachlan Macquarie in recognition of Throsby's exploration journeys in the colony. The present

Tony Hordern's House  
(Milton Park), February 1912  
Source: Allen Collection,  
Mitchell Library





Above: Bathing Pool, Bowral  
Source: Parry Collection,  
Mitchell Library

Above right: Diving Board at  
Elvo and in the Bathing Pool,  
March 1912  
Source: Allen Collection,  
Mitchell Library

Thanks to Leah Day, historian,  
for pictorial research.



Homestead, Throsby Park was built in 1836. Other large grants included Newbury, Oldbury, and Wingecarribee which still operate as rural properties. In addition small land grants were made to free settlers. Many of these small grants were later amalgamated or bought out. Of necessity, as in other parts of the colony, wheat was a major crop. However, the main fame of the region was as excellent grazing country, a reputation which survives today in the landscape of open pastures and remnants of former eucalypt woodland punctuated with fine plantings of introduced trees which include pines, elms, oak, poplars and cypress.

The years 1840-1860 saw consolidation of major pastoral holdings. Wheat growing continued and the area was known as one of the finest wheat growing districts in the colony with Newbury and Throsby Park receiving particular note. Post-1860 period was one of rural extension east of the pastoral zone as selectors took up small land parcels following the passing of the 1861 Robertson Land Act. Land hitherto thought to be too densely timbered was occupied and cleared for dairying and crops such as potatoes. The period also saw the subdivision of limited parts of some of the earlier large grants into smaller rural blocks for dairying. Dairying subdivision has continued in the present century. Additionally there was Community development post-1860 resulting in development of a number of new country towns and villages (Bowral, Moss Vale, Robertson, Bundanoon, Burrawang), and the continued existence of earlier townships, (Sutton Forest, Exeter, Berrima, Mittagong). The arrival of the railway in 1867 was a major factor in community development.

Tourism and recreation from 1868 resulted in the area becoming popular as a tourist destination after the opening of the railway from Sydney. The growth in popular tourism was followed by the development of country residences as summer retreats for wealthy Sydney people. These include

places such as Retford Park (c1887), Summerlees (c1875), and Hillview (late 1870s) which was bought in 1882 for the use of the Governor of New South Wales. The establishment of these country houses and their equally well-known gardens is extensively documented in *Gardens of the Southern Highlands*.

Patterns in the existing landscape reflect these periods of landscape making and the values of people through history. The pastoral landscape where the earlier land grants took place in the belt from Sutton Forest through to Throsby Park has larger scale paddocks and a variety of trees from remnant eucalypts to introduced species. It is reminiscent of the open park-like character which attracted the approbation of the first Europeans to see the area. In the post-1860s landscape the scale is smaller paddocks and larger stands of eucalypts. Around Robertson the small scale landscape has a particular charm.

In 1838 Conrad Martens painted Throsby Park in a Romantic pastoral setting. It is still possible to see this landscape with layers of change over time. It is reminiscent of Lachlan Macquarie's entry in his diary for 18 October 1820:

*We met a numerous herd of about 400 head of cattle belonging to Mr Throsby feeding in a fine rich meadow .... The grounds adjoining Mr Throsby's hut are extremely pretty, gentle hills and dales with an extensive rich valley in his front, the whole having a very park-like appearance, being very thinly wooded...*

There are other notable components in the landscape reflecting its rich history. For example, records of the area being a significant wheat growing area and ploughing competitions in the 1830s can be seen on the hillside west of Sutton Forest. The whole hillside is marked by surface archaeological remains of ridge and furrow ploughing. The result is that the whole landscape is a remarkable document of social history. Its layers tell a fascinating story of people, events and places through time when you know how to read them aright.

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Ken Taylor is Professor of Landscape Architecture and Co-Director, Cultural Heritage Research Centre, University of Canberra. In 1991 he led a team involved in preparing The Wingecarribee Shire Historic Landscape Study as part of a wider Shire Heritage Study.



a glimpse of

# Betsey Throsby's WORLD

by David Burke

A PRIZED POSSESSION of the National Library in Canberra is a portrait of Elizabeth Isabella Broughton at the age of about seven. The watercolour, completed in 1814 by Richard Read (c.1765-1827?) now resides in the National Library's Rex Nan Kivell Collection.



With this fine portrait, as the *National Library of Australia News* explains, come two stories, one of collector's instinct and another of murder and mayhem. Sir Rex Nan Kivell spotted it in the window of an antique shop in Salisbury, England. He thought the lighting in the painting was not English, but Australasian. So he bought it - and in the frame found a long manuscript description of the events that had led to its painting:

*William Broughton came to Australia as a servant on the First Fleet, and later served at Norfolk Island. There he lived with Elizabeth Heathorn, who had arrived in 1792 as a convict. They had five children. In 1809 Elizabeth and her two-year-old daughter Betsey sailed for England on the ship 'General Boyd', which on the way visited the east coast of New Zealand in search of timber spars. At Whangaroa the crew and passengers, save for Betsey and three others, were killed by Maoris.*

*Three weeks later Alexander Berry, a Scots merchant also seeking timber, heard of the massacre and came to investigate and rescued the prisoners. Betsey was taken to South America on board Berry's ship, for his cargo was destined for Lima, and waited there for nearly a year, until a ship bound for New South Wales arrived. After her return to Sydney her father had this portrait painted as a gift for the family who had cared for her in Lima. This is the saga Rex Nan Kivell found in the frame, written out by her father. Betsey Broughton stayed in New South Wales, married and had seventeen children.*

If you want a slice of Australia's early colonial history, go to Betsey Throsby's world in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales. This lush meadow country, watered by meandering streams and fringed with the blue haze

of distant hills, was once the nation's brave frontier.

In the footsteps of the explorers, Governor Macquarie in 1819 declared that a 'new Country' - 'the Argyle' - lay some 130 kilometres to the south of Sydney. Land was to be thrown open for pasture and crops and the making of villages; convicts were to build the roads; soldiers sent to police and protect; settlers to follow in their trail. Men of property and the humble farmer gathered wives and children, loaded drays and headed south. They felled forests, grazed cattle and sent produce to market; they mined coal, refined oil shale and hammered out iron.

Among those who grasped the challenge of the Southern Highlands we find the discoverer of Moreton Bay and the Brisbane River, a founder of the first bank, an originator of Randwick Racecourse, the explorer of Australia's inland river system, the surveyor of the site of Melbourne, workers from the world's first public railways, the child survivor of a massacre, veterans of Waterloo and eminent colonial architects - and a horseback clergy whose parishes once encompassed most of south-eastern Australia.

What trace of these early men and women and their works remains today? The aborigines, pioneers, the chain gangs and the troopers have long disappeared. Berrima, of course, treasures its streets of dreams; in back lanes, venerable cottages are glimpsed through leafy foliage and the countryside contains its scatter of grand houses and gardens, mostly in private ownership.

Berrima went into a time warp in the late 1860s when John Whitton preferred an easier route through Bowral and Moss Vale for his Great Southern Railway. Colonial architect,

Elizabeth Isabella Broughton by Richard Read, painted c.1814. Presented to the National Library of Australia by the late Sir Rex Nan Kivell. By permission of the National Library of Australia.

Edmund Blacket's first church commission was in Berrima - the Holy Trinity, opened in 1849. Blacket would go on to design three cathedrals (including St. Andrew's) and the first section of the main quadrangle of Sydney University and its Great Hall. A staunch Anglican, organist, Greek scholar, in every way an English gentleman, he arrived bearing a letter of introduction from the Archbishop of Canterbury. Appointed diocesan architect at the age of thirty, he was soon sketching the sort of strong and sensible stone churches that his Lord Bishop and friend, William Grant Broughton, hungered to consecrate. Broughton described it 'one of the best and handsomest churches in the diocese'.

*...a fine extensive pleasure ground...*

The way to Sutton Forest is the nearest thing in the Southern Highlands to a 'royal road' of old. Along this route of some five kilometres from Moss Vale platform to the vice-regal summer retreat of Hillview, every Governor of New South Wales had travelled over a period of seventy-eight years.

The village of Sutton Forest once considered itself to be the social centre of the Argyle. Moss Vale was referred to as Sutton Forest North, with Bong Bong regarded as something of a rural district. The first white men to sight the region from Mount Gingenbullen reported in 1798 on a 'fine open meadow country with fine green hills'. Governor Lachlan Macquarie named the district during his travels in 1820 in honour of the son of the Archbishop of Canterbury who was also Speaker of the House of Commons. Macquarie remarked on the vast number of large forest kangaroos which in later years would become the target of an annual 'shoot'. The village site, which reminded Macquarie of a 'fine extensive pleasure ground of England' went on to accommodate four hotels, of which the Royal, in name at least, is the lone survivor.

If Sutton Forest was vice-regal territory, then Exeter could claim to be the seat of the nearest approach to old-fashioned squiredom in the Southern Highlands. Here settled the Badgerys and the quaint Anglican Church of St Aidan's standing to the right of the road on entering the village is largely a testimony to their dedication.

For a start, the Badgerys gave Exeter its name, taken from the home county of the Badgery patriarch who, with his young wife, sailed from Devon to start a new life in a land of promise.

With its slanting buttresses and large semi-circular windows and substantial stone cross, St Aidan's is unique as the only Celtic-style church in the Southern Highlands. The roughly trimmed basalt of the thick walls came mostly from a gully on nearby Indigo Creek where locals

gathered and moved it to the site at eighteen pence per drayload; some was also dug on the first Badgery property, Vine Lodge. Bundanoon supplied the fine quality sandstone which is deftly shaped around door and window surrounds and the buttressed corners.

Employees of the Yates company presented the church Bible in 1896. A bronze plaque near the entrance recalls the life of Arthur Yates (1861-1926), the man of seeds, and of his wife Caroline Mary.

Set in parklike grounds amid a grove of cedar, oak and other English and native trees, St Aidan's preserves the atmosphere of its Badgery beginning. Spanning the watershed is a curious feature of its location. If parishioners hose the lawn on the western side of the grounds, the run-off eventually finds its way via Paddys River and the Wollondilly, Nepean and Hawkesbury rivers to the ocean at Broken Bay. Yet a watering at the front or eastern side takes the run-off to Bundanoon Creek and ultimately through the Shoalhaven to the sea at Nowra, 240 kilometres to the south of Broken bay.

*...a singularly energetic place...*

Burrawang, at over 800 metres above sea-level, is a village of one wide main street, three shops and a pub. A guide of the 1880s described it as a 'singularly energetic place'. Nowadays the atmosphere is rather that of a refuge from the hustle and the bustle. Sometimes the weekday quiet hints of an earlier Highlands settlement in a tucked-away district that provided potatoes, poultry, vegetables and dairy produce for the city market; and of men who led their packhorses laden with kegs of butter and cheese along the track to Moss Vale railway.

The tall timbers that flank parts of the Burrawang road on the turn uphill from the Illawarra Highway are survivors of the majestic forest of messmate and red cedar that once dominated this area.

Burradoo, a name that means 'a stand of brigalow trees', may have no post office, pub or general store (it can boast a small railway platform and a single mail box) but it is strong in tall trees, fine gardens and in education, contemplation and relaxation.

The hand of John Horbury Hunt (1834 - 1904) has left its imprint in old Burradoo; he is described in the *Australian Encyclopedia* as 'the only architect of genius to practise in Australia in the 19th century'. Born in Canada, he came to Sydney in 1863, designed close to one hundred of the colony's most memorable buildings, and died almost a pauper at the age of 66. Yet he displayed 'architectural thinking 20 to 50 years ahead of his contemporaries' and his work recognised



'the natural qualities of timber and brickwork...anticipating the philosophy and work of the early 20th century architects.'

Horbury Hunt commenced in the employ of Edmund Blacket - his last association would be as pall-bearer at his master's funeral. But while Blacket is recalled as a calm and kindly man, Hunt's label is 'fiery, quick-tempered and intolerant', which may explain why he averaged around three commissions a year for his thirty years of private practice, beginning in 1869.

In 1879, Horbury Hunt designed Riversdale, the house around which Chevalier College is built. Henry Hill Osborne, the wealthy client knew that in engaging John Horbury Hunt something original and unusual was likely to emerge - and it did. People asked if Riversdale resembled a Swiss chalet, but more likely it reflected the American touch of New England, from where Hunt's 'Royalist' family fled after the War of Independence.

The next owners, Mr and Mrs Billyard Leake (Charlotte Leake was a Tasmanian heiress, and it was agreed hers would be the final family name), in 1888 required Horbury Hunt to add a ballroom. When the task was finished, Hunt went to court over his fee, as not infrequently happened (but this time he won).

*...a 'fairy circle' of English trees was planted to protect young ladies' fair complexions...*

Similar works to Horbury Hunt's style can be glimpsed from Eridge Park Road where, to the rear of the Chevalier grounds, Hartzer Park is situated. The large conference and retreat centre named after the Franco-Prussian lady, Marie Louise Hartzer, a widow with two sons, who was first Superior-General of the missionary order, the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, stands on a property established last century for another merchant prince, who, like the governor and his cohort, found the highlands' air and soil much to his liking.

The two-storey house, then known as Eridge Park, with its quaint Victorian Gothic gate-lodge (now on a separate title), was built by Sir Robert Lucas Tooth, MLA, in 1880. Tooth (1844-1915), Eton educated, married to his cousin Helen, was a partner in the Kent brewery and subsequently chairman of Tooth and Company. With his immense beer barrel fortune, he built The Swifts at Darling Point and established a unique English-style estate (having its own Blacket church) at Kameruka on the south coast. From his elite Jersey herd, originated at Burradoo, he pioneered commercial cheese making in the Bega Valley.

Eridge Park had an extensive dairy farm and vegetable garden, and around the playground

a 'fairy circle' of English trees was planted to protect young ladies' fair complexions from the savage Australian sun. The floors and outer walls of the house were fashioned from the timber of malt bins that had come laden on sailing ships from England; the foundations were pine tree trunks and a private gas-generating plant provided the household lighting.

Nearby is Kerever Park, locally famed for its display of flowers, shrubs and trees that each year are encouraged to look their best at Tulip Time. Charles and Florence Fairfax named their new property Knoyle when they settled there in the late 1880s. Charles was a part-owner of *The Sydney Morning Herald*, then a closely-held family company.

The Fairfaxes laid out the spacious gardens and planted the now century-old trees, some of which are unmatched in the Highlands. They include the largest Wellington cypress in the district and one of the only two mature Caucasian firs in New South Wales.

Travelling south on the main road from Bowral, an obelisk to the left, shortly before reaching the Wingecarribee river, marks the site of Bong Bong village, the first settlement of the Southern Highlands. Here, on the north side of the stream, stood a police encampment, a post office, a scatter of military huts and a commissariat store. On the southern side, yet well above the floodwaters which frequently bedevilled the settlement, stands Christ Church, arguably the most historic of all the Highlands Anglican churches. A web of our colonial past is woven about the 'Throsby Church', as it was also known - built originally of red sandstock bricks, roof beams of pitsawn hardwood, slingles from split she-oak.

Charles Throsby erected his fine homestead between 1834 and 1837, and then, with some help from the Lord Bishop of Australia, financed the church on his own freely-given land. Neither Moss Vale nor Bowral existed when Throsby decided on his church. The early colonial architect and pioneer, John Verge (1728-1861) charged eight pounds for his plans in 1837. Verge's greatest works, executed a few years earlier, were Camden Park, which he designed for John Macarthur, and Elizabeth Bay House in Sydney, for the politician and businessman, Alexander Macleay.

Betsey (Elizabeth Isabella) Throsby, daughter of William Broughton, a servant who came in the First Fleet, was born on Norfolk Island in 1807, where her father had been assigned as commissary officer. Betsey survived the Maori massacre of the General Boyd's passengers and crew

David Burke is an author and member of the Southern Highlands branch of the Australian Garden History Society. His latest book, *Australia's Last Giants of Steam* has just been published. David's book, *The World of Betsey Throsby* (illustrated by Anne Ferguson) is published by Kerever Park, Burradoo will be available for \$10.00 each at the Conference at Bowral in November.

at Whangaroa, in 1809; her mother, who was taking her to England lay among the slain. Alexander Berry, a Scottish merchant, rescued four survivors and took the infant Betsey on his ship to South America, where she was placed in the care of Don Gaspardo Rico's family in Lima until reunited with her father in 1812. At the age of 17, Betsey wed the dashing young barrister who was destined to be one of the colony's notables. By him she had seventeen children - nine sons and eight daughters. Around the church, a grove of cyprus pines was planted, one for each child. Two trees perished by fire and now fifteen remain. Betsey died in 1891 and lies buried in the historic graveyard behind Christ Church, along with many other pioneers of those early frontier days. Conservation of the cemetery surrounds is one of the works in progress by the

Southern Highlands branch of the Australian Garden History Society.

Bong Bong flourished only briefly. Sutton Forest was always its rival, and both gave way to the more strategically placed Berrima, until the coming of the iron horse. Bowral and Moss Vale, allied with Mittagong, henceforth would be the centres of society, commerce and worship. But the Wingecarribee of Betsey Throsby still meanders on its westward course. To the east and west, if you can ignore a busy main road, the paddocks she roamed still stretch towards wooded horizons. At night the stars above can blaze, just as she watched them, with all the brightness of sharp-cut crystal. From the white-painted walls and a 'very pretty tower', her Christ Church looks beyond the ghosts of Bong Bong to the unchanging face of a most historic corner of Australia.

Wind passing through Throsby Park by Robyn Mayo (1986) 45 x 30.5 cm





# Australian flora 200 years OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND CULTURAL CHANGE

by **Robyn Mayo**

Insects and Eucalyptus  
Etching, 30 x 23 cm 1988

EXACTLY WHEN ABORIGINAL PEOPLE first trod on Australia's rocky raft as it floated away from Antarctica covered with rain forest, cycads and inhabited by monotremes, lung fish, flightless birds, and marsupials is unknown.

The oldest settled site so far discovered is at Kakadu in Arnhem land, here stone tools and crayons of high-grade ochre were found dating back 60,000 years giving aboriginal people the longest tenure of a significant land area in human history.

Since splitting from the enormous Gondwana land mass 50 million years ago, Australia has been isolated from the other global landmasses. Continental collision, glaciation and volcanic activity recycled minerals and renewed soils. Isolated from these forces Australian soils contain half the nutrients of other continents making them the poorest in the world. Australia's flora has adapted to a dry climate and poor soils, so, unlike the water-retaining cactus of America and Africa, woody plants dominate. They are slow growing and have small ridged leaves with waxy or hairy surfaces such as banksia, eucalyptus and acacias.

About 15,000 years ago the freshwater lakes of central Australia dried up - Lake Eyre holds skeletons of enormous extinct animals who had tried to find refuge from the encroaching heat. The aboriginal population decreased and had to change from a diet of shellfish and fish to one of flour made from native grasses or millet gathered green to retain vitamins and protein. Hunter-

gatherer techniques suited the driest continent on earth. Each forest, river, bay, beach and mountain was individual tribal territory, these tribes were semi-nomadic, their movements dependant on the seasonal eating of ripe fruit, edible flowers and roots. Tribal land never changed stewardship. Connecting these tribal regions throughout Australia was a circulating system of songlines where information was passed from generation to generation through songs, stories, art and ceremonies. These aboriginal people chose to follow the plan of life laid down by their ancestors, with personally crafted simple wooden instruments, maintaining a completely independent existence for over 60,000 years.

Food gathering was a daily practice, the men hunted, the women were foragers, men providing for their parents, women for their husbands. Distribution of food was complex, women spent long days with their children collecting a wide range of vegetables and animal food such as honey, ants and witchetty grubs. When food was scarce they ate unpalatable nuts, fibres, roots and leaves, briefly chewing them for any goodness and then spitting out the fibres and seeds for speedy regeneration. They practiced the random cultivation of plants, for example

Christmas Bell and  
*Banksia oblongifolia*  
Ink and Watercolour



## CYCADS OSMOND VALLEY THE KIMBERLEYS WA

Cycads are living fossils – so slow growing, a trunk may be less than a metre high and yet be 400 years old.

Cycads are closely related to conifers and have a long fossil history at one time being a food for dinosaurs. Limited to tropical and subtropical areas like later developing legumes, clovers and alfalfa's, cycads employ bacteria to fix nitrogen in their special roots enabling the plant to grow well even in infertile sand and improve the nutrient content of the soil.

Cycads are gymnosperms – plants whose seeds take 1-2 years to germinate developing from ovules that are directly exposed to pollen grains, disseminated by the wind, water is however required for fertilisation as the males have swimming sperm.

Despite being resistant to fire and drought, clearing has constantly reduced their numbers and they are now protected by law. Cycad seeds are most nutritious. The problem is they are poisonous, needing special preparation prior to becoming edible.

The early explorers found cycad husks at Aboriginal camps and assumed the seeds were safe to eat. Cook, La Perouse, Flinders, Grey, Leichhardt and Stuart all experienced their adverse effects. Detoxification methods by aboriginals varied according to local tradition, the women removed the toxins by laboriously cracking, soaking, grinding and baking the seeds. Large starchy cycad seeds stripped of their toxins sustained huge social gatherings of Aboriginals for weeks at a time. Surplus seeds could be ground and fermented in water providing food for months after seeding.

The Kernels of seeds exposed to natural weathering including bushfires over many months or longer were ground into flour (which has excellent keeping qualities) to make damper - a preparation mimicked by early settlers when wheat flour supplies dwindled. Those Aboriginals who used fire to trigger the production of starchy seeds, farmed *Cycad media*, which grows in tropical groves.

Arnhem Land aboriginals chop up male Cycad flower stalks mixed with warmed urine and apply it to spear and circumcision wounds for the healing and antibiotic properties.

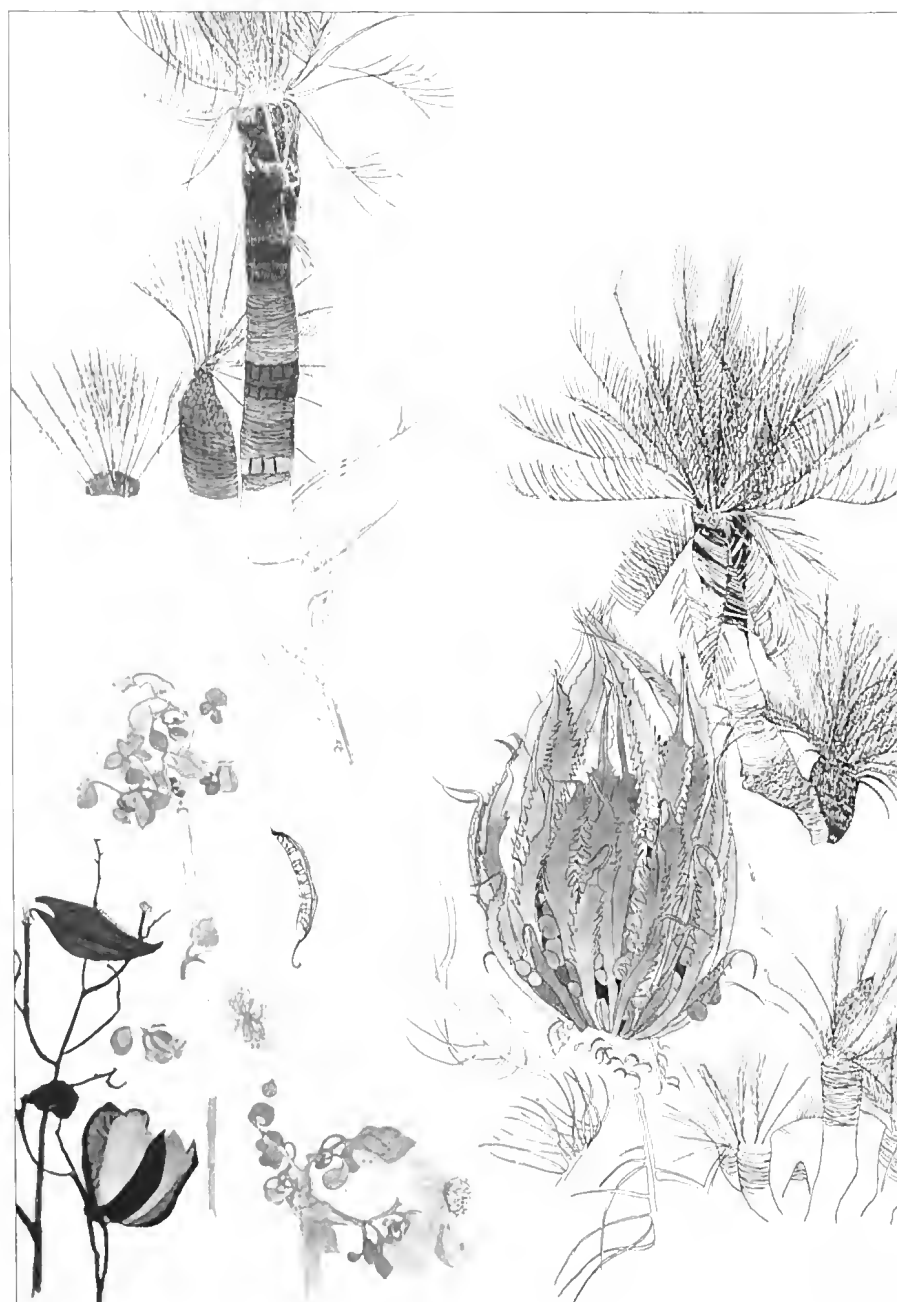
when they ate yams they ate only the lower portion, replacing the top.

Knowledge of plant uses was passed verbally from parent to child to grandchild using an encyclopedic knowledge of plants and animals, combined with a keen sense of the elements such as wind and seasonal weather patterns. This intimate association with the environment, provided for all their daily needs. The equilibrium with the food supply was helped by population control. Aboriginal women have a storehouse of methods for terminating the early stages of pregnancy, as well as a knowledge of herbs which act as contraceptives. In Queensland unwanted pregnancies were terminated with a drink made from poisonous gidee beans.

Aboriginal people survived in Australia through a well-developed knowledge gained over thousands of years of experience of how to find,

below left:  
Field Studies of Cycads  
Osmond Valley  
Ink and Watercolour  
77 x 50 cm

below:  
Field Studies of Cycads  
Osmond Valley  
Ink and Watercolour  
77 x 50.5 cm





use and cook what was growing wild. They increased yields by the use of fire - a settled lifestyle and material possessions were never appropriate, for indigenous animals with paws, claws, or webbed feet are unsuited to pulling a plough.

Aboriginals have a phenomenal ability to recognise and name any plant from the slightest fragment of a leaf, in fact some indigenous languages have forty to fifty words to describe the particular shape of leaf. Daily wanderings, searching and exploring the surrounding world, tasting, smelling leaves, sap or stems often rubbing plants on their bodies was all of great importance, for Aboriginals believed their great ancestors placed humans, animals and plants in specific areas.

Australia's unique flora remained untouched as a result of its position away from the Old World. Aboriginal people made only fleeting trade contracts with Indonesian and Chinese sailors mainly on the Northern Coast and Coburg peninsula close to the ancient trade route between Indonesia and China. The Masassan traders came for trepang and seaslugs, their encounters being recorded in Aboriginal ceremonies and rock painting.

Australia's first contact with Europeans came in the 17th century, the Dutch mariners who landed on the dry West Australian coast, Hartog (1616), Tasman (1642) and de Vlamingh (1697) did not venture inland and paid little or no attention to the flora. Australia's first European explorer with an interest in natural history was William Dampier (1651-1715), who landed on the North west coast in January 1688 returning a second time in 1699 as commander of the *Roebuck*. During this journey he kept notes on the landscapes, soils, vegetation, tides, the sea floor, winds and the weather. He pressed plant specimens carefully and professionally, fortunately he was able to save his notes and specimens when the *Roebuck* foundered, returning to England in March 1701.

These specimens have survived for over 300 years and are housed in the Oxford University Herbarium. The Sturt Pea is my favourite, recorded probably on East Lewis Island in September 1699. *A Voyage to New Holland* published in 1703 provides us with the first European drawings of Australian flora and fauna.

Dampier's publication aroused the interest of the British Admiralty resulting in the Endeavour voyage under Captain Cook, whose mission was to observe the Transit of Venus on Tahiti and to confirm the existence of *Terra Australis*. The botany discovered on this voyage is well recorded and led to the establishment of the first European settlement on Australian soil at Botany Bay in 1788.

Banks appears to have ignored his Journal entries when recommending settlement to the Government, 'The soil wherever we saw it



Burnt out Landscape (Following the burnt out ridge line from Cockatoo Springs WA to Keep River NT)  
Ink Drawing - 105x168cm

## FIRE

As Australia became drier and soils were more impoverished the Eucalypts and Mulgas took over. Fire tolerant species replaced more sensitive broad-leaved forests which lacked regenerating powers. The tough durable wood on fire resistant eucalypts resists the ravages of fire and regrowth sprouts from buds protected in their inner bark. Eucalypts also constantly shed bark, branches and leaves that combine with their oil to create a gas which ignites as fireballs. These blazes last until the fuel is spent. Charcoal deposits indicate fires in the tolerant forests pre-date human arrival by 50,000 years.

consisted of either swamps or light sandy soil on which grew very few species of trees'. On May 3, 1770 Banks had a successful day of feverish collecting around the land named by Cook as Botany Bay. Here Banks had spread the collected plant specimens on a spare sail to dry in the sun. Two hundred and thirty years later many of these are to be found in the Sydney Herbarium. The Endeavour voyage set a very high standard for botanical exploration, over 3600 plant specimens were collected, many were new to science, classified by Solander and drawn by Parkinson.

Banks and Cook never returned to Australia. Banks became the unofficial Director at Kew through his friendship with George III. Kew under Banks' supervision became the main repository for the botanical specimens of the British Empire, expeditions from all over the world enriched this scientific collection and at the beginning of the 19th century a seed bank of over 4000 species of the world's flowering plants had been assembled.

Botany was a term used as early as 1660 to describe the study of plants by physicians and apothecaries. Medical practitioners used these physician's gardens to grow medical plants and teach students. It was to these gardens that newly discovered species were sent. By the end of



the 18th century the hundreds of Botanical Gardens in Europe both private and royal were vying for anything new, and many of these centres of scientific research received Australian plants from voyages of exploration during the 18th and 19th centuries. Finally botanic gardens spread to the colonies so as to perfect local and introduced plants for agriculture and amusement. Barrels of plants covered in canvas were sent to Kew from the Sydney Botanic Gardens to be displayed in glass houses using methods of heating perfected during the Industrial Revolution.

In 1837 the invention of the Wardian Case made transporting sensitive plants to and from the Colonies, viable. These mini glass houses protected plants from outside influences and maintained reasonably constant conditions during the voyage. By the time the British settled Australia, moving plants in sailing ships around the world had become an industry. They were grown to make money both in the new colonial possessions, or on their return, to grace the gardens of the gentry.

Australian plants struggled to survive in the overcrowded Temperate House at Kew where there was not enough light or dryness. To commemorate the Director, Edwards Salisbury's visit to Australia in 1949, the Australian Government gave the Australian Glasshouse to Kew. The house was originally stocked from seeds obtained from 600 indigenous Australian plants. In 1994 the Australian House was converted into the Evolution House and the Australian plants returned to the Temperate House to chance their luck. Some plants changed their habits and now flower in their countries seasons, others kept their inbuilt time clock and flower as they had in Australia.

Seeds are an important way of transporting plants for purposes of propagation. To prolong virility of the seed, boxes, bottles, tins and pots were hermetically sealed then bedded in sand or brown sugar and coated in wax or resin. Banks asked diplomats, army and naval officers, merchants and missionaries in this way to remember Kew.

The eleven ships of the First Fleet under Captain Philip left England in May 1787 arriving at Botany Bay in January 1788, where due to a lack of botanical knowledge they virtually starved. The store ship H.M.S. Guardian was wrecked in mid 1789 on its way to Australia carrying on its quarter deck a green house full of agricultural crops for the infant colony. This greenhouse was intended to return with Australian flowering plants for the King's garden at Kew. Banks, therefore, had to be content with seeds brought back when the First Fleet returned to England during 1789.



Banks wrote to Hunter in 1797 'when prosperity returns I seek the King's permission to establish a botanist with you'. By then it was too late.

In July 1788 four hectares of cereals, chiefly wheat, was planted in a plot of ground cleared by convicts, this plot marked the beginning of the first botanical garden outside Europe. It also marked the beginning of the march of introduced flora across this island continent with disastrous consequences for the environment.

Long before the establishment of any form of garden by colonial hands the local Guringai people utilised Port Jackson for food. To the new settlers the land appeared wild and untouched by cultivation. The beauty of Port Jackson was matched with concerns over the capacity of the country to sustain settlement. The new settlers had no botanist or gardener to give them advice and believed the area devoid of useful vegetation.

left: Collection from Eucumbene  
Near Cooma N.S.W.  
Watercolour 104 x 66 cm



Robyn Mayo was born and educated in Goulburn. She commenced her artistic training at the Art School of the North Sydney Technical College in 1961, continuing the following year in the East Sydney Technical College before travelling to Europe for three years to study at various institutions there. Robyn returned to Australia in 1967, showing watercolours and etchings at a number of exhibitions and held her first solo exhibition at the Blaxland Gallery in July 1986. 'Artistic Reflections on the Garden' was a near sell-out success and a limited edition book illustrating the painting was similarly received. Since then Robyn has had a number of watercolours and etchings hung in exhibitions including one in the Wynne Art Prize of 1986. Robyn Mayo's watercolours and etchings are represented in the Vaucluse House (National Trust of Australia), Historic Houses Trust and Artbank Collections. Many of the works on these pages will be in Robyn's next exhibition which will run from July 29 to August 19 in the Goulburn Regional Gallery, New South Wales.

Settlers found the soils to be sandy and thin and came to consider Australia's unique flora nutritionally and economically worthless. These 18th century settlers termed the land *Terra Nullis*—belonging to no one. They did not consider worthwhile the gleaning of knowledge from native Australians whose good health was obvious, for their wounds healed quickly and they had strong white teeth. The depth of Aboriginal culture and their knowledge of the land was greatly underestimated and the colony came to rely on imported food, or crops grown from imported seed.

George III's interest in agricultural and rural affairs led to his introduction of the Spanish Merino sheep to improve wool quality in England. A public auction on August 15, 1804 at Kew saw John Macarthur purchase seven rams and three ewes for his Australian estate at Experiment Farm, Parramatta. The hooves of their descendants continue to destroy the fragile ecology of the Australian landscape, and their teeth eat the regenerating paddock gums.

Between 700,000 and 2,000,000 aboriginals inhabited every climatic region of this vast island continent. The country that the colonists took from them contained magnificent forests, extensive and unpolluted rivers and virgin uneroded salt free soils, from which one could gather enough for a nourishing and varied diet. As we enter the 21st century it is surely time to reflect on this achievement.

The white arrivals ate and drank beef and beer, spurning native foods. They considered Australia's edible plants as unworthy of being eaten. A settler's lifestyle of material possessions was inappropriate for native Australians and soon their lack of immunity to introduced diseases such as small pox and measles reduced their numbers drastically.

If only the lessons learnt from this 18th century interest in botany had been understood. We would have lived in a different Australia free of blackberries, thistles and gorse.

Australia's unique flora should be making a far greater contribution to national well being and lifestyle, especially in such areas as food, medicine, cut flowers, garden plants and cabinet timbers. Australians have barely scratched the surface of this potential. For example, Eucalyptus oil is now gaining acceptance as a vapour rub, antiseptic and inhalant. *Melaleuca Alternifolia* is the source of a growing market in tea tree oil. A common dry land plant in Queensland *Acacia Holosericea* has seeds higher in protein and fats than wheat or rice, seeds that can be roasted, boiled like lentils or steamed. It has taken over 200 years for Aboriginal ways and methods to be acknowledged leading to an increased interest in native foods of commercial value, such as macadamia nuts, bunya nuts,

quandongs, kakau plums, wattle seeds and Illawarra plums.

Clearing land for crops, grazing, towns and roads leads to destruction of native flora. Introduced plants cause drastic damage when they escape to become prolific weeds in the bush. Seeds from these plants are spread by birds, garden refuse, wind and water, in fact one third of all declared noxious plants in Australia originated from introduced garden plants.

In recent years biology and earth sciences have developed a metaphor for the ancient concept of the earth as a living organism, renaming the planet and the biosphere Gaia, after the ancient Greek mother goddess. The Gaia concept brings our thinking close to an understanding with that of the Aboriginals. When the earth is sick and polluted, good human health is impossible. To heal ourselves we must heal our planet, to heal our planet we must heal ourselves. In his Journal, Captain Cook noted the first sighting of Aboriginals - 'they appear to be in reality far more happy than we Europeans, the earth and sea of their own accord furnishes them with all things necessary for life - they covet not magnificent houses, they live in a warm, fine climate and enjoy wholesome air so they have little need of clothing'. How far has Australian civilisation progressed in the last 200 years since Europeans first settled these shores? In 1979 the Federal Minister for Science launched a 20 year project to produce a definitive flora of Australia, the task is monumental, few parts of Australia have been fully explored and thousands of square kilometres remain untouched.



#### THE ACCLIMATISATION MEDAL

One aspect of European settlement was the formation of Acclimatisation Society's. A medal designed by Landseer in 1857 was awarded to seafaring men, passengers from different countries, or locals who rendered valuable service to the cause of the Association. This resulted in the introduction of animals such as deer, alpacas, rabbits and hares, to the detriment of local flora and fauna.

# Louisa Attkinson and her OLDBURY landscape

by Dr Elizabeth Lawson



CAROLINE LOUISA WARING ATKINSON was born at Oldbury Farm, Sutton Forest, on the lower Southern Highlands of the colony of New South Wales, on 25 February 1834.

Her parents, James and Charlotte, both writers, were early free settlers; her mother a brilliant teacher, her father an innovative, successful grazier.

Oldbury, which James Attkinson built in two storeys of stone a few years before Louisa's birth,

still stands solid and gracious near the Medway Rivulet. Here, botanist Louisa was later to find a species of heath, *Epacris Calvertiana*, which would press her married name into secure Linnaean Latin. Similarly

secure in its English names and surrounded by English oaks, elms and hawthorn, Oldbury promised Louisa riches, stability and long life. It was to give her none of these.

Oldbury stood also on the lee of Mount Gingen-am-bullen which protected it from the

Oldbury Farm c. 1830

storms and bitter winds that rode in off the southern alps; and looked east toward Berrima, a sandstone colonial town wearing, but more dubiously than the nearby mountain, its ancient Aboriginal name. Berrima, or 'southern place', of which Louisa wrote long after: 'If possible little Berrima is more dull than ever'. In Oldbury James Atkinson created a model farm which won widespread admiration. But Oldbury's promise was clouded by its exploitation of the convict system and by its dispossession of the local Gandangara people, a dispossession the family at least recognised. And just above the house on a natural terrace of the mountain rose a great Aboriginal grave-mound with carved funeral trees which Louisa was later to sketch. This mound and its increasing desolation stood in silent rebuke of Oldbury's enterprise, of its new English place-names and all they signified. But more immediately, both Oldbury estate and its young family fell into disarray with the death of Louisa's father a few weeks after her birth - weeks which also concealed the heart defect which was to compromise Louisa's life and occasion her early death.

In the last years of her short life, the mature artist Louisa painted Oldbury shifting beneath dissolving mists, grey under the rain of Gingen-ami-bullen. In an incomplete painting (reproduced on the back cover of this journal), Oldbury is tonally harmonised and intimately known. For Louisa it was an emotional centre to which she frequently returned. But it was also a place lost, a place visited; and like this late fine watercolour and her own life, it was a place unfinished. In 1839, the five-year-old girl and her family fled an Oldbury household reeling under the violence of an alcoholic stepfather and second husband. From the rough comfort of a lurching bullock dray, the lovely retreating homestead with its deciduous trees must have seemed as intangible as a European watercolour, a fragile wash of names and memories, a landscape brushed in water across a land whose solidity was, after all, bare, ancient, alien.

Louisa Atkinson's life and art were to reflect this paradox of seeming solidity and effective brutal loss. Known everywhere for her vivacity and happy temperament, her personal life was nonetheless tragic. Even the products of her working career, with their confident professionalism and quiet self-generating brilliance, did not go untouched by the litany of loss which followed her days and became the poignant signature of her death.

In her brief adult life (she died at thirty-eight years), Louisa practised as a professional botanist and natural historian, a skilled taxidermist,

journalist, novelist and artist. With the exception of her last novel, which was published posthumously, all her novels, stories and natural history articles were published in Sydney during her lifetime, to a responsive public. A handful of her early drawings of animals, birds and places appeared as engraved illustration to her nature notes in the *Illustrated Sydney News* from October 1853 until the collapse of the *News* in June 1855. With the exception of a few dried ferns mounted on cardboard which survive in the Mitchell Library, her large 'valuable collections' of specimens from many fields, including glass cases of stuffed birds and animals, were incinerated when Oldbury was put to auction on the accidental death of Louisa's brother, in 1887.

Her proposed book of ferns survives in the Mitchell archive as a collection of forty beautiful plates bound together. Her proposed *Natural History*, with its many plates of birds and animals, was sent by botanist Ferdinand von Mueller late in her life for publication in Germany. Occasioning much excitement in Louisa's last letters, the plates and text of this book are either still astray in Germany or perished in the Oldbury fire. The bonfire is the more likely possibility, since any remaining plates were those reputedly saved at the last minute by Louisa's young daughter. Two Sketchbooks and many loose sketches survive: the tone and content of the few extant manuscripts and letters suggest, not only her passion for botany and the other sciences, but an original voluminous correspondence with scientists and friends.

Sometimes, when a family conflagration takes place, letters and other works sent to friends and correspondents eventually come to form a scattered repository of valuable material. However, except for two known letters, Louisa's work cannot be said to have benefited from this pattern. And sadly, this (luckily salvaged) letter from Louisa's friend Minnie Harnett, of Rosebrook property near Cooma where Louisa visited and made sketches in early 1871, seems to compound the sorry story of the burning of much work at Oldbury in 1887. Minnie writes:

*My dear Mrs Calvert*

*...it was so good of you to send the sketches so soon, they are so nicely colored too, and are the admiration of many of our friends, especially Mr Dawson who is an artist and of course understands when a drawing is properly done - I wish I could sketch as well. Mr Harnett intends having them framed as soon as possible.*

Framed or not, these sketches have not been found. With the exception of her published journalism, Louisa's work seems to have depended for its survival on the care of her

Dr Elizabeth Lawson, writer and critic, has published widely on Australian and other literature. Elizabeth is the great-granddaughter of Louisa Lawson (1848-1920), Australian feminist, suffragist, and editor of the first Australian journal for women, *The Dawn*. And the great-niece of Louisa's son, writer, Henry Lawson.

Elizabeth's chief interests are Australian literary, natural and art history. In 1989, *Louisa Atkinson: The Distant Sound of Native Voices* was published - a compilation of writings about aboriginals by James, Charlotte and Louisa Atkinson with an introductory essay by Elizabeth about attitudes at the time. Her scholarly edition of Louisa Atkinson's first novel, *Gertrude the Emigrant*, *A Tale of Colonial Life* was published in 1998. This novel, written by Louisa in 1857, was based on Oldbury, which she fictionalised as Mumumbownie.

Elizabeth's book about Louisa's watercolours, *The Natural Art of Louisa Atkinson* was published in 1995 by the State Library of New South Wales Press.

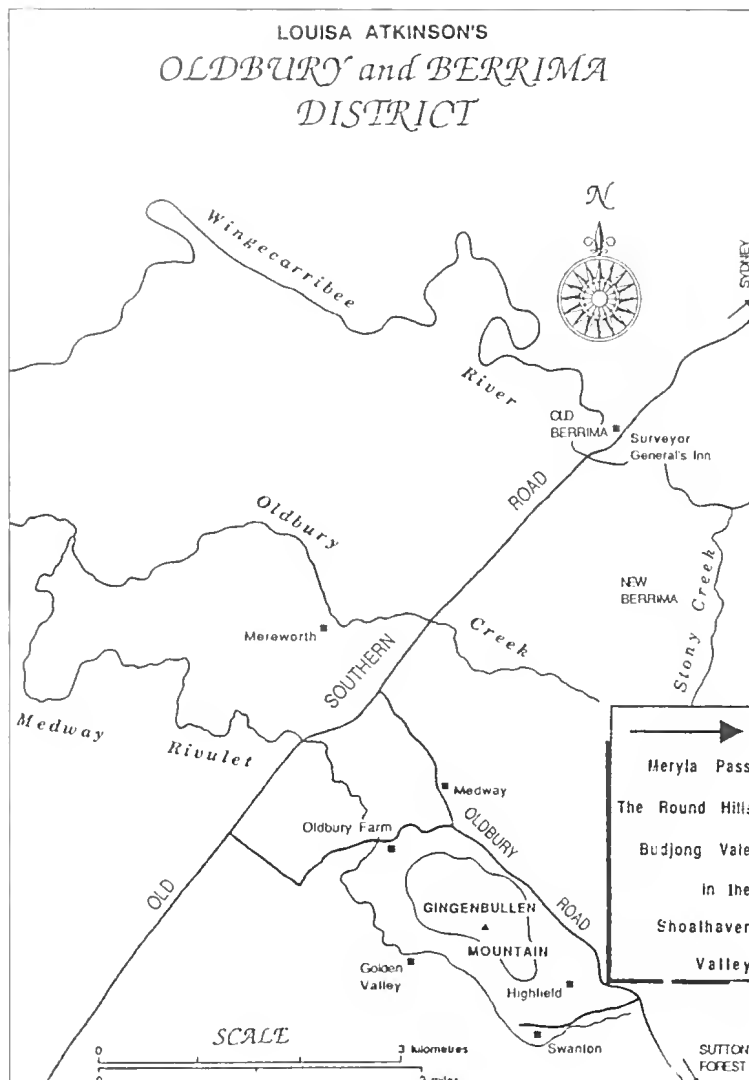
These books are available from The State Library of NSW Bookshop. Hardback copies of *The Natural Art of Louisa Atkinson*, originally \$49.95, are now \$17.95. Enquiries (02) 92731611

daughter and granddaughter, and then on the latter's bequests to public institutions.

Family and personal history show that it was crucial to Louisa's life and work that, for most of her adult career, she did not marry. Her mother's insistent advice against marriage may in large measure have been self-interested: Charlotte needed a companion. Estranged from her first daughter ('lost' to an early marriage), she had watched her second die in childbirth; her third was frail and especially talented. Yet a pathetic memoir written just before Louisa's death includes a passionate tribute to Charlotte, a life-long companion whose final years demanded a nursing so arduous that it threatened Louisa's own life. Further, much of Louisa's fiction suggests a rich and sustained collaboration with her mother and her mother's memories. And so it happened that in a colony short of middle-class 'marriageable' women, where marriage for most women meant status and security, Louisa Atkinson lived and worked independently, unmarried until her last few years. Unmarried she had time for work; unmarried, it must be said, she survived to work.

Educated women of Louisa's time often apologised for trespass into the professional world of publishing. Louisa never apologised. Her public writing is open, confident and forthright: her letters to her many friends including scientists and botanists direct, cheerful and businesslike. Her fiction, more cryptically, recommends the life of hearth and motherhood while presenting active heroines like herself who have scant time for this. In her brief career as an artist, scientist and journalist, in becoming Australia's first native-born woman novelist and the first to illustrate her fiction, she seems barely to have noticed the orthodoxies of womanly behaviour. Even so, her fiction reflects many of the tensions of her early life, such as her mother's struggle with the male executors of the Oldbury estate and the patriarchal prejudices of Sydney's colonial law. She lived knowing that women must actively defend their privacy and independence in an often hostile culture.

As a currency lass, Louisa Atkinson lived out the paradox of her European-colonial world. Stories in her novels fix clear echoes of her troubled family life in the weird sentimental arrangements of Victorian novels, but then unravel these through bustling pictures of Sydneys town and a naturalist's and artist's descriptions of forest and bush. She loved Oldbury, but turned away from its elms and oaks in admiring pursuit of native flora. Her botany applied the Linnaean system of taxonomy with practised confidence, but her lively temperament



sought out 'popular', sometimes Aboriginal names. Writing, sketching and painting in the eighteenth-century English manner, she nonetheless painted all she saw with native-born eyes which, apart from one trip to the Hunter, never left her home sites of the Southern Highlands, Kurrajong, Sydney and the Shoalhaven. The Sketchbook of her mother and teacher, Charlotte, is visibly more 'English' than her daughter's.

Louisa's scientific and artistic life formed part of a great imperial project fanning out from Europe and London in the work of hundreds of explorers, scientists, collectors and artists. But even within that unquestioned commitment her keen native eyes intervened. Remembered for her swiftness and agility, she was one of the first European artists in Australia to sketch the swiftness and agility of the native animals and birds. Except for a few precisely observed posies, she painted no still lifes. Agile and quick in all her field work, she knew that this moving life was her world. She knew that things leap and run and fall, that everything, even Oldbury itself, appears and then vanishes.

Louisa Atkinson's Oldbury and Berrima district from *Gertrude the Emigrant* edited by Elizabeth Lawson.



# THE *English garden* THROUGH THE 20TH CENTURY

A Melbourne reviewer once heralded his review of an English gardening book with an exasperated 'Not another English gardening book', but his not so subtle complaint has gone unheeded; still they flow in endless array, the glossy propaganda of the English gardening press. It is beginning to seem like a case of their being unable to say anything new so they become habituated to repeating endlessly what has been said before. To characterise the English garden writers this way is undoubtedly unfair for there are many creative and perceptive writers based there, but it does seem fair enough comment that the mainstream of garden writers have got stuck in a time-war somewhere in the Edwardian era bathed in the light of a golden afternoon.

Jane Brown's book is a thoroughly revised edition of a former work *The English Garden in Our Time from Gertrude Jekyll to Geoffrey Jellicoe*, published in 1986. A retrospective look into the recent past, it came at the peak of the New English Garden, a revisionist form of what she terms the New Georgian gardens of Norah Lindsay, Lawrence Johnston and Victoria Sackville-West, and just before the new wave of ideas from Europe and North America typified by Piet Oudolf, Wolfgang Oehme, James van Sweden and Ken Druse. The revised edition reads as though there has been no change, no moving on. There is an uneasy reference to Roberto Burle Marx and the Post-Modernists led by Thomas Church

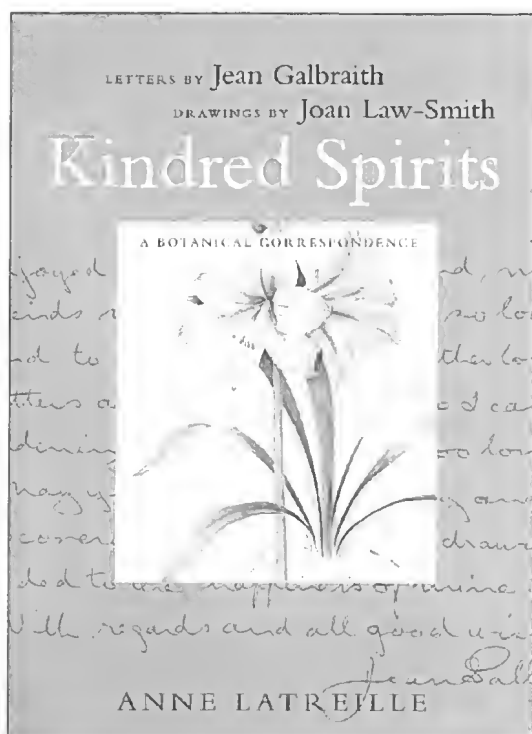
and Christopher Tunnard but they are presented as isolated dead ends rather than the points of tension between domestic retrospective views of gardening and landscape as a response to new architecture and new art forms. Sutton Place, the last chapter of the book encapsulates this want of insight; it being presented as a phenomenon harking back to the 18th century with Geoffrey Jellicoe the designer fulfilling the aspirations of the grandee proprietor Stanley Seeger.

As a slice of history the book is perhaps satisfying enough but it makes little effort to set the period in a larger context, or in a longer term view. Maybe this is asking too much. The English seem to have been highly successful in creating a legendary view of their garden history, their garden designers, plant hunters and garden writers. It seems they have arrived at that point where they need to leap the garden fence to see the world beyond.

A niggling small point is that some of the illustrations have been so greatly reduced that it is impossible to read the accompanying text; otherwise a handsome publication and a neat summation of the period even if only as a jumping off point to a deeper appreciation of garden history.

Trevor Nottle is a garden writer and lecturer based near Adelaide. He is currently researching Mediterranean influences on the landscape for a Masters degree in Landscape Architecture. An active member of the AGHS since its beginning he is a frequent contributor to these pages.

by Jane Brown  
Garden Art Press, Woodbridge, Suffolk UK,  
1999  
RRP \$49.95  
distributed in Australia by Peribo Books



## KINDRED SPIRITS

*Kindred Spirits* is the story of a botanical correspondence, between the flower painter Joan Law-Smith and the naturalist and writer Jean Galbraith. It has at its core a 'college of one', conducted by correspondence - Jean's letters and botany lessons, Joan's drawings in response. What followed was a meeting of minds far beyond the original lessons, with a wealth of riches in their shared beliefs, attitudes and life experiences.

Writer Anne Latreille's biographical text outlines both women's full and challenging lives before they met, and their considerable achievements since. This is a delightful, personal picture of two talented, original women whose contribution to Australian garden history is immense.

Published by  
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c/- Royal Botanic Gardens, Birdwood Avenue, South Yarra,  
Victoria 3141 Phone (03) 9650 5043  
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## australian *Elm* register

The South Eastern States of Australia have been most fortunate in having thousands of magnificent northern hemisphere trees planted by our early landscape architects and gardeners, in parks, streets and private gardens.

by Jo Grigg

The elm has been used extensively in both urban and rural areas to provide structure to many well known Australian gardens, both public and private. Elm trees lend themselves to avenues, looking wonderful during all seasons, with the electric green of spring, the dense darker foliage of summer, the yellow glow of autumn, and the cathedral majesty of their boughs in winter.

As most readers would be aware, elms worldwide have been devastated by Dutch Elm Disease, and Australia is one of the few countries not yet hit by this deadly fungus. Millions of elms have been killed in Europe, in a large part of Asia and most of the USA. In Southern England alone, the loss has been put at 17 million elm trees.

Dutch Elm Disease is a fungus whose spores enter a tree's vascular system where they multiply and become sticky yeast cells which choke up the whole system. Branches wilt, leaves yellow (when they should be green) and the tree dies in about one year. The vector which spreads the fungus is the Elm Bark Beetle and lives under dead and dying bark in the elm tree. Victoria does have Elm Bark Beetle as well as the more familiar Elm Leaf Beetle, so we must be ever vigilant in minimising these two beetles. Without the presence of Dutch Elm Disease, the Elm Leaf Beetle is our major concern, as it can defoliate an elm in one season if not checked.

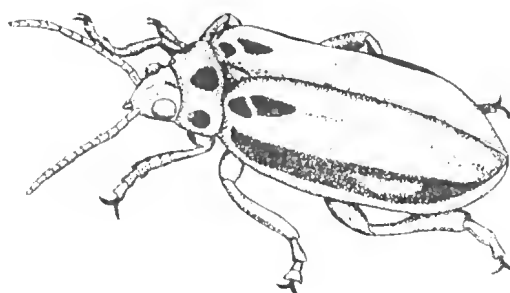
Owing to the ever present threat of Dutch Elm Disease being discovered in Australia, a contingency plan is soon to be released, which has been established by the Elm Pests and Diseases Task Force in Victoria. This Task Force is composed of government representatives, including Agriculture Victoria, the Melbourne City Council and Friends of the Elms. A major project, which the Friends of the Elms has

undertaken, is the establishment of a register of all elms in Australia.

New Zealand's success at minimising the impact of Dutch Elm Disease is largely attributed to the high standard of their elm register, and has taught us how imperative it is to have an extensive register to pinpoint geographically as many elms as possible. New Zealand authorities inspected all elms and removed and buried elms exhibiting signs of Dutch Elm Disease. With annual inspecting, New Zealand has been successful, and Dutch Elm Disease is almost eliminated with only a few trees being removed in the last few years.

The Friends of the Elms would appreciate all elm owners registering their elms by ringing the Hotline 0409 870860 to request a registration form, or provide the address of any elms of which they are aware, so that a form and explanation of the importance of the register can be mailed to the owners. As this is an enormous task for a small voluntary organisation we need the assistance of the community, and all garden lovers.

The Friends of the Elms Inc. is a not-for-profit organisation which was founded in 1990 for the purpose of raising funds for research into threats to our elm trees, both in private and public ownership. In addition, the organisation exists to enable local government and government bodies to liaise with the public and keep people informed on the threats to elm trees and how they can assist in various ways.



As Dutch Elm Disease has not come to Australia, the major threat to our elms is the European Elm Leaf Beetle, which has no native predator in this country, and is spreading through Victoria. However, there are many things elm owners can do to reduce the spread of this defoliating beetle. These include different levels of defence, from simple banding of the trunk, to canopy spraying or the most effective defence is to inject the soil around the root system in early spring. The Friends of the Elms pamphlet gives details on all these methods and can be obtained by ringing 0409 870860 or writing to The Friends of the Elms, C/- The National Herbarium, Birdwood Ave, South Yarra, Vic., 3141. The Friends of the Elms strongly recommend that elm owners endeavour to reduce the population of this devastating beetle, until Agriculture Victoria can successfully release a predator and that all suckers be removed so the main trees have more hope of survival.

Jo Grigg is Vice President of The Friends of the Elms and a member of the Australian Garden History Society.

Elm Leaf Beetle

## OBITUARY Geoffrey Stilwell



## Benalla EXHIBITION

Benalla Art Gallery in Victoria will be holding an exhibition of botanical art from June 7 through to July 16. Entitled *Town and Country: an exhibition of botanical illustration*, illustrators from throughout Victoria have contributed: Jean Dennis, Hilary Sutherland, Melanie Schneider, June Roberts, Dianne Emery, Beverly Graham, Mary Gregory and Anita Barley.

The Exhibition will celebrate the opening of a major refurbishing program funded by a grant from the Centenary of Federation Fund. Renowned art critic, Peter Timms will launch the exhibition at a luncheon on Saturday June 10.

*Plectranthus oertendahlui* by Mary Gregory

Geoffrey Thomas Stilwell died in Hobart in March. His death marks the passing of an era in historic research, particularly in Tasmania but generally all over Australia and even overseas. He was born in Launceston in 1931 and took an active interest in local history while still at school. He went on to work at the Tasmanian Archives after graduating and spending some time at other libraries.

It was his incredible memory for historical details, especially relating to family history coupled with a generosity of spirit which marked him out from others in the field. Countless authors, of everything from a newspaper columns to multi volume histories, came to rely upon Geoffrey to solve problems relating to gaps in their knowledge. 'Why did Mrs X build such a large garden?' 'Because it had to be larger than her sister's!' Geoffrey would respond and he would be right.

He was an active member of the National Trust and his knowledge of the early ownership and history of many buildings assisted the Trust to save a number of places threatened by development proposals. He remained a member of the Southern Committee for more than 30 years. For many of his years at the State Library of Tasmania he was the Curator of the Allport Collection which involved not only books but fine household collection of furniture, china, silver and paintings.

Geoffrey was awarded an AM in 1988 in recognition of his contribution to recording Australian history.

- John Morris

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The Society is affiliated with the Australian Council of National Trusts and is thereby able to benefit from the Trusts' tax deductible status.

\*Donations are welcome and should be payable to the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) and forwarded to the AGHS.

Membership benefits: subscription to the Society's official journal, *Australian Garden History*, six times a year; garden related seminars, lectures, garden visits and specialist tours; opportunity to attend annual conference and conference tour; contributing to the preservation of historic gardens for prosperity.

AGHS Office, Royal Botanic Gardens, Birdwood Avenue, South Yarra, Vic. 3141

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THIS FORM CAN BE PHOTOCOPIED SO THAT THE JOURNAL CAN BE RETAINED INTACT

# CALENDAR of EVENTS

## MAY

TUESDAY 9

*Vic Melbourne* — AGHS/OPCAA  
Autumn Lecture Series: Stephen Ryan -  
Amblés in the Andes *Venue* Mueller  
Hall, Birdwood Avenue, South Yarra  
*Time* 7.30pm *Cost* \$10  
(\$12 non-members) includes supper.

SATURDAY 27

*Vic Birregurra* — Working bee  
Turkeith *Enquiries* (03)9397 2260

## JUNE

SUNDAY 4

*Tas Glaziers Bay* — Rose pruning  
and hedge trimming Workshop  
*Venue* The Scented Rose, 585 Coast Rd,  
Glaziers Bay *Time* 12 noon onwards -  
BYO picnic in the grounds followed by  
demonstrations *Cost* \$8.00 *Bookings*  
Elaine Rushbrooke (03) 6295 1816

MONDAY 5

*Vic Melbourne* — Winter lecture 1:  
Jane Shepherd - Gardens of the 18th  
Century *Venue* Mueller Hall, Birdwood  
Avenue, South Yarra *Time* 7.30pm  
*Cost* \$10 (\$12 non-members).

THURSDAY 8

*ACT Canberra* — Talk by Dianne Firth  
on Heritage Roses *Venue* C.C.E.G.G.S.  
Aquatic Centre *Time* 8 pm *Cost* \$8  
(\$10 non-members)

SUNDAY 25

*Vic Melbourne* — Working bee Buda  
*Enquiries* (03) 9397 2260.

MONDAY 26

*Vic Melbourne* — Winter lecture 2:  
Richard Heathcote - Love Apples  
and Other Temptations from the  
Nineteenth Century Vegetable  
Kingdom *Venue* Mueller Hall,  
Birdwood Avenue, South Yarra  
*Time* 7.30pm *Cost* \$10  
(\$12 non-members).

## JULY

SATURDAY 15 – SUNDAY 16

*NSW Wagga Wagga* — Weekend  
Winter Seminar

SATURDAY 22 – SUNDAY 23

*Vic Melbourne* — Weekend Winter  
Seminar 'The Influence of Immigration  
on our Gardens'. Interstate members

welcome. Booking form available.  
*Enquiries* (03) 9827 8073

SATURDAY 29

*Vic Beaufort* — Working bee Belmont  
*Enquiries* (03) 9397 2260.  
*NSW Sydney* — Exploring the Sources  
with Peter Watts, Dr James Broadbent  
and Megan Martin at Historic Houses  
Trust Office, Lyndhurst, in Glebe. The  
library at Lyndhurst houses a collection  
of great value to researchers into garden  
history. Dr James Broadbent and Megan  
Martin, librarian at Lyndhurst, will  
discuss the resources available at the  
centre. This is also an opportunity to  
meet informally with National Chairman  
Peter Watts. *Time* 6 pm *Venue*  
Lyndhurst, 61 Darghan Street, Glebe.

## AUGUST

FRIDAY 11

*ACT Canberra* — AGM and guest  
speaker *Venue* C.C.E.G.G.S.  
Aquatic Centre *Time* 8 pm  
*Cost* \$8 (\$10 non-members)

MONDAY 14

*Vic Melbourne* — AGM 7.30pm  
followed by Winter Lecture 3 - Peter  
Timms WHAT FINER PROSPECT:  
or 'why we like views' *Venue* Mueller  
Hall, Birdwood Avenue, South Yarra  
*Time* 8pm *Cost* \$10 (\$12 non-  
members) *Enquiries* 9397 2260

## OCTOBER

SUNDAY 15

*NSW Yass* — 'Yonder to Yass' - a walk  
around the country town of Yass.  
*Cost* \$10 (\$12 non-members) includes  
afternoon tea.

## NOVEMBER

THURSDAY 2

*NSW Southern Highlands* — 21st  
Annual National Conference Registration  
*Time* 2 - 5 pm *Venue* Bowral Memorial  
Hall, Bendooley Street, Bowral.

FRIDAY 3 - SUNDAY 5

*NSW Southern Highlands* — 21st  
Annual National Conference:  
Richness in Diversity - From Grassland  
to Rainforest - From Stone Walls to  
Potagers. Speakers include Dr Judyth  
McLeod, Dr David Tranter, Ray Nolan,

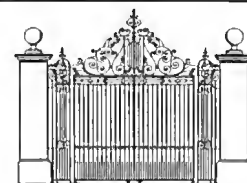
Greg Stone, John Hawkins and eight  
passionate gardeners: Michelle Scamps,  
Geoffrey Cousins, Marylyn Abbott,  
Geoff Duxfield, Robyn Mayo, Nicholas  
Bray, Jane Lemann and Sarah Cains.  
Booking form enclosed. *Enquiries and  
bookings* Jackie Courmadias, AGHS  
office (03) 9650 5043.

MONDAY 6

*NSW Southern Highlands* — Optional  
Conference Day visiting five landmark  
gardens including Kennerton Green,  
Whitley and Buskers End.

TUESDAY 7 - THURSDAY 9

*NSW Southern Highlands* — Post  
Conference Tour: Off the Beaten Track.  
Three days exploring some of the  
regions most historic buildings,  
landscapes and gardens in the Berrima,  
Marulan, Bungonia and Goulburn area.  
Accommodation at The Briars, Bowral.  
*Cost* \$480.00 (Single Supplement  
\$264.00). *Bookings* AGHS Office  
(03) 9650 5043.



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# THE ART OF LOUISA ATKINSON

THE BACK PAGE

by Elizabeth Lawson



Louisa Atkinson. 'Oldbury'.

Pencil and watercolour.

22.2 x 18.4 cm.

Title below in pencil in artist's hand. 'Lobster' Sketchbook,

f. 64, Mitchell Library,

PXA 4499.

Permission from the State Library of New South Wales

## REFERENCE NOTES

Quotations used can be found in 'A Voice from the Country',

*Sydney Morning Herald*,

24 May 1870, 16 June 1870,

2 January 1871.

All of Louisa Atkinson's finest paintings (1853-72)

are reproduced in

full high quality colour

in Elizabeth Lawson's book,

*The Natural Art of*

*Louisa Atkinson* (1995).

Louisa Atkinson's six or seven watercolours of her paternal home, Oldbury Farm, present the property within a flowing landscape of rich eucalypt forest. Only this detailed, intimate 'Oldbury', adopting the style of her bird and flower specimen sketches, subdues its bush setting. It is remarkable, then, that even in this intensely focused painting, Louisa cannot bring herself to eclipse Oldbury's forested landscape, nor the precise lines of Gingenbullen hill with its scattered blue eucalypts. These are her home's natural home.

As an inveterate strayer, Louisa strayed most of all from the oaks, elms and hawthorns of Oldbury to her native forest and her naturalist's passion for it. A century and half before the present crisis of Australian forests, she blamed 'the extensive killing of the forests' for the making of 'deserts'

and the loss of 'large flocks of birds'. Elsewhere she writes of a 'wide-spread death among the forest trees' near Berrima, of the destruction of its black-butts, 'even the woolly-butts'. And she writes further that 'it needs no fertile imagination to foresee that in, say, half a century's time, tracts of hundreds of miles will be treeless'.

In 1870, contemplating her bushland with its creatures of such 'gentle disposition', Louisa briskly recommends that the feral cat now breeding in the 'fastnesses' of the Murrumbidgee should be 'determinately destroyed'.

In the late 1860s, she already knew, however, that the greatest problem was forest felling, 'for while the woodman's axe can fell the growth of a century in an hour, the forest springs up but slowly'.